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## THE DERIVATION OF "DAVEN-EN"

By A. MISHCON, London.

FEW words are so explicit in their meaning and yet so obscure as to their origin as the Yiddish word *Daven-en*, which is so widely used to denote the reading of the statutory—morning, afternoon, and evening—services.

Arabic and Aramaic, English and French were each of them suggested to have given birth to it. But the evidence so far adduced seems unconvincing enough to justify yet another attempt, which is here made, to decide its derivation.

J. Bernstein, in his *Jüdische Sprichwörter und Redensarten* (German section, p. 16), suggests an English origin. *Daven*, he thinks, may have been derived from *dawn*, the English for daybreak, the time from which the reading of the morning service may begin.

But his own remark that "the etymology of the word is unknown" is indeed the best proof that he regarded his theory as no more than a conjecture.

According to Dr. H. Hirschfeld (*Curiosities of Jewish Literature*, London, 1913, p. 17), the origin is traceable to the Arabic *Diwan*, a collection or compilation (of prayers). *Daven-en* would therefore mean to read out of a *Diwan*.

It must, however, be admitted that while the derivation from "dawn" suggested by Bernstein would narrow down the application of our word to the morning service only, Dr. Hirschfeld's interpretation would make it far too wide.

More loose still is the meaning assigned to it by the suggestion that it is derived from the French *Devoner*, implying devotion, or dedication.

A typically talmudistic theory ascribes to our word an Aramaic origin. It is said to be דאבותן "of our fathers," and to have originated from the rabbinic statement (Bera-kot 26b) תפלות אבות חקנום, The set services were instituted by the Patriarchs. Nor is this the only rabbinic derivation. Another suggested by Rabbi Avigdor Chaikin, Dayan in London, associates the word with קא דאוי למזרח of Shabbat 35a (see also Jastrow, *s. v.*), and gives it the meaning of "gazing wistfully towards the east."

The suggestion which I venture to make is that the origin of our word is to be traced to Latin rather than any of the languages mentioned before. *Daven* is, in my opinion, a variant of the Latin *Divin* from which we get our term *Divine Service*. In support I would cite the following analogies:

1. Another Yiddish word which, according to Bernstein (*op. cit.*), is used by Jews in Germany in exactly the same sense as *Daven-en* is *Oren*; this, of course, is formed from the Latin *ora*—pray—with the addition of the German infinitive ending *en*.

2. The Yiddish word *Benschen*, which means to pronounce a liturgical benediction and is so closely akin to *daven-en*, is likewise derived from the Latin *benedice* (evidently through the Italian) with the addition of the same suffix *en*.

It therefore seems quite feasible that, like its two allies, our word, too, has a Latin origin. Thus,

Ora + en = Oren.

Benedice + en = Benschen.

Divin + en = Daven-en.